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TAGS: PINS PREL PGOV PHUM TU IR

SUBJECT: IRAN/POLITICS: TEN DAYS OF DAWN, THE OPPOSITION'S D-DAY?

REF: (A) ISTANBUL 31 (B) RPO DUBAI 21

Classified By: ConGen Istanbul Deputy Principal Officer Win Dayton; Reason 1.5 (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Several contacts (in Istanbul, Paris, and Tehran) who are close to Iran's "Green Movement" have cautioned that the opposition intends to use the "Ten Days of Dawn" commemoration (February 1-11) to muster the largest demonstrations yet against the regime. A journalist with many opposition contacts was told that some student groups are prepared to use violence, including molotov cocktails, against riot control police if the police initiate violence. A Mousavi campaign staffer said there is a spirit of martyrdom among many protesters who believe that if the regime is forced to kill large numbers of them it will cause a split within the security forces. A Tehran-based activist said many Tehran students are fanning out to other cities to mobilize marches throughout Iran as a show of the movement's national support. Comment: The regime is not unaware of opposition plans and is taking its own strong steps to intimidate the opposition and discourage protests. Some observers suggest that despite the violence of previous demonstrations, the regime has not yet come close to using the deadly force on a scale of which it is capable. If the first few days of demonstrations in February are bigger than the regime expects, one contact warned us to watch out for the regime deploying combat-ready IRGC troops, which would be a sure sign that the regime has decided to unleash a new order of magnitude of violence to quell the opposition. End summary.

¶2. (C) Several contacts of ConGen Istanbul's NEA Iran Watcher who have close ties to Iran's Green Movement opposition have cautioned that the opposition intends to use the upcoming February 1-11 "Ten Days of Dawn" commemoration (of the anniversary of Ayatollah Khomeini's return from France and the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran) to bring out the largest crowds of demonstrators yet seen in the eight-month political crisis since Iran's contested June 12 presidential election.

¶3. (C) Following the remarks to us (ref A) from presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi's legal advisor, Ardashir Arjomand, that the opposition turnout and tactics, culminating on February 11, would shock the regime, we pulsed several other contacts with ties to the opposition for corroboration.

¶4. (C) A Farsi-speaking western journalist who lived in Iran until 2007, covered the elections from Tehran, and stays in close touch with Green Movement figures at all levels of their organization, told us that the opposition is calling on supporters to turn out in steadily increasing numbers starting on February 1. They plan an organized, steady

build-up of numbers with the intention of reaching a crescendo of millions of marchers on February 11, Iranian Victory Day. According to this journalist, many of the students who make up the bulk of opposition supporters are prepared to use pre-meditated violence in the event Iranian security forces initiate violence, which they believe is almost certain. In anticipation of the regime relying on armored riot-control vehicles rather than more vulnerable motorcycles, for example, groups of students are planning to disable the vehicles by throwing eggs filled with paint and glue on their windshields, forcing the security forces inside to open the windshields or drive blind. This reporter was told that some of the more radical students are then prepared to rush in and throw molotov cocktails into the vehicles, even if it means killing security force members inside. "They have enough supporters willing to fight and die. They think February 11 could be a turning point, the Green Movement's D-Day."

¶ 15. (C) In an effort to increase the movement's base of support, teams of students have reportedly been engaged in "awareness building" with other university students, as well as with other segments of society including seminarians, regular military conscripts, office workers, and public service workers. Groups of students are disseminating CDs which include footage of security force beatings and killings of peaceful marchers during previous demonstrations. The CDs also include the collected speeches and statements of opposition leaders including Mousavi and former Majles Speaker Mehdi Karroubi, as well as from deceased Ayatollah Montazeri and other moderate or reformist high-ranking clerics, emphasizing the constitutional legality, reasonableness, expediency, and consistency with Islamic

values of the political demands that the Green Movement has been making.

¶ 16. (C) The former head of Mousavi's pre-election "get out the Youth vote" efforts in Mashhad, a political refugee now in France, told us by email that protesters intend to march and demonstrate peacefully, but if they are attacked by security forces they will attack back in an organized way using their own rocks, knives, and clubs. The protesters believe that they will have the numbers and willpower to overwhelm whatever security force units are sent to repress them. He said there is a spirit of martyrdom among many of them, who feel that this is a cause worth dying for, and they also believe that if the security forces feel forced to shoot and kill significant numbers of them, it will cause a split within the security forces, which are already plagued by plummeting morale.

¶ 17. (C) An Iranian women's rights activist in her mid-20s, who works as a project manager for a Tehran NGO, said that many state-run companies have announced holidays that week, encouraging their employees to travel to holiday destinations along the Persian Gulf coast. In response, many opposition supporters are indeed planning to visit family or friends in other cities throughout Iran, to help mobilize more effective demonstrations that would demonstrate to the regime (and the international community) the Green Movement's national following. She said the Green Movement's goal is to ensure significant demonstrations in all major Iranian cities (especially those with universities), conceding that organizing a serious turnout in Iranian cities, towns and villages without a significant student population remains a challenge.

¶ 18. (C) Comment: As ref B noted, the regime is not unaware of opposition plans to use the Ten Days of Dawn as a rallying week, and is taking its own strong steps to intimidate the opposition and discourage significant Green Movement turnout. Of the contacts we pulsed, only one lives in Iran, and she admitted she was not sure if she would march on the "big day", February 11, for fear of being shot on sight, or arrested, tried, and executed. Indeed, if the "Ten Days of Dawn" opposition turnout is much lower than these contacts expect, it would reinforce the conclusion that while the

opposition has staying power, it is nowhere near reaching a critical mass necessary to threaten the regime's hold on power.

¶ 9. (C) Comment, continued: Some observers, including the journalist cited above, suggest that although past demonstrations have turned violent, the regime has not yet come close to using the deadly force on a scale of which it is capable. Until now, he noted, most crowd control duties have been relegated to police, Basiji conscripts, and thugs. If the first few days of demonstrations in February are bigger or more unruly than the regime expected, he warned that the regime may mobilize and deploy combat-trained and fully-armed IRGC troops to control and disperse crowds, which would be a sure sign that the regime has decided to unleash a new order of magnitude of violence to try to quell the opposition.

DAYTON